

# **Committee on International Relations**

**Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats**

## **Statement of Chairman Elton Gallegly**

**The State of U.S. - Turkey Relations**

May 11, 2005

Today, the Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats is holding a hearing on recent developments in the relationship between Turkey and the United States.

Few relationships over the past century have been as critical and at the same time mutually beneficial as our relationship with Turkey. It is a strong friendship that was essential to the United States throughout the Cold War and provided support for a stable ally in an unstable region. And it is a relationship that is entering a new stage, a stage in which the seemingly unbreakable bond between our two countries has begun to show evidence of cracks.

I am deeply concerned about the marked cooling in Turkish-US relations in recent years. A key development in our relationship was of course the decision of Turkey's Parliament, led by the Islamic-based Justice and Development (AK) Party, to refuse the US military permission to attack Iraq from its territory in 2003. At the same time, Turkish public opinion has shifted sharply in a negative direction towards the United States and our military. A recent survey of European attitudes conducted by the German Marshall Fund found that, of the ten nations surveyed, the Turks had the most negative views towards the United States. A rising number of anti-American publications in the Turkish press and anti-American statements from select Turkish administration figures have only heightened US concerns.

At the same time, the U.S. and Turkey share many views and interests on the world stage. Most importantly, Turkey is a stalwart ally in the war on terrorism, Turkish peacekeepers have served in many parts of the world in support of American policies, and Turkey currently

commands the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. The United States also continues to support Turkish membership in the European Union and we welcome the recent EU decision to begin negotiations on Turkish membership.

In light of their proposed entrance into the EU and their key partnership in NATO, there are three issues of primary focus for the United States in relation to Turkey. The first is the ongoing situation in Cyprus. I congratulate the Turkish Cypriots on the recent election victory of President Mehmet Ali Talat and echo the State Department's recent statement reaffirming President Talat's commitment to a comprehensive solution and reunification of the island.

The second issue is the stance of Turkey on the Armenian question. I look forward to hearing the panelists' views regarding the proposal of Prime Minister Erdogan to create a joint Armenian-Turkish commission to review further the historical dispute of the tragic events between 1915 and 1923. Furthermore, I encourage both governments to work toward establishing full diplomatic relations and reopening their common border. Only through dialogue and courage on both sides can relations between these two nations be normalized and the wounds begin to heal.

Finally, there is the issue of the Kurdish minority in Turkey. Developments in Iraq and the issue of the status of the Kurds within the new Iraqi federal government loom large over Turkey's internal situation and its external politics, and is an area of potential dispute between the United States and Turkey.

In order to keep informed on this very important issue, we look to our panel of experts to provide us with the latest developments in this critical relationship and their analysis of what the immediate future holds.

I will now turn to Mr. Wexler for any opening statement he may wish to make.